

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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AMCONSUL BOMBAY
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AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
13TH AF CLARK AFB PI

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 9435

NOFORN

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MORG, MPOL, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN AIR FORCE LEVELS

1. (U) THE DELHI PRESS JUNE 15 REPORTED THAT IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH PM DESAI, PRESIDENT CARTER EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT INDIA WOULD NOT ACQUIRE THE DEEP PENETRATION STRIKE AIRCRAFT (DPSA), AS THIS WOULD ESCALATE THE ARMS RACE IN SOUTH ASIA. ACCORDING TO THE "STATESMAN," DESAI TOLD US BASED INDIAN
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REPORTERS THAT "WE ARE NOT IN AN ARMS RACE AT ALL. WE ARE ONLY REPLACING PLANES WHICH WILL BECOME OBSOLETE IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS. WE ARE REPLACING SEVEN SQUADRONS WITH FIVE SQUADRONS AND SO REDUCING AND NOT INCREASING." THE "TIMES OF INDIA" FRONT PAGE ACCOUNT OF THE STORY WAS HEADLINED: "IAF HAS FEWER SQUADRONS NOW," AND THE CLAIM THAT INDIA HAS REDUCED ITS AIR FORCE FROM SEVEN TO FIVE STRIKE SQUADRONS WAS CITED

AS BEING CONSISTENT WITH THE PM'S VIEW THAT ALL NATIONS MUST START THE PROCESS OF DISARMING.

2. (C) THE CATEGORIZATION AND COUNTING OF INDIA'S AIR FLEET IS SUBJECT TO SEVERAL INTERPRETATIONS. THE REAL QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS HOW MANY AIRCRAFT INDIA NOW HAS AND IS PROJECTED TO HAVE IN TEN YEARS WHICH ARE CAPABLE OF A STRIKE ROLE (I.E. AIR TO GROUND ATTACK). FOR THIS PURPOSE FIGHTER/INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT WHICH PRESENT ARE CONFIGURED TO SERVE AS STRIKE AIRCRAFT OR WHICH WITH ONLY A MINIMUM OF MODIFICATION COULD BE SO USED SHOULD BE COUNTED AS STRIKE-CAPABLE AIRCRAFT. FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, THE CLAIM THAT INDIA IS REDUCING ITS STRIKE FORCE IS INACCURATE. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE AAIRA PROVIDES AN ACCOUNTING OF INDIA'S PRESENT AND PROJECTED STRIKE-CAPABLE FORCE AND DEMONSTRATES THAT UNDER ASSUMPTIONS MOST FAVORABLE TO THE INDIAN CLAIM OF A DECLINING STRIKE FORCE THAT THE NUMBER OF STRIKE-CAPABLE SQUADRONS WILL REMAIN CONSTANT DURING THE NEXT TEN YEARS.

3. (U) FROM PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S REMARKS IN THE "STATESMAN," WE ASSUME THAT THE SEVEN SQUADRONS OF "PLANES WHICH WILL BECOME OBSOLETE IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS" ARE THE EXISTING CANBERRA AND HUNTER STRIKE SQUADRONS WHICH THE DPSA IS SUPPOSED TO REPLACE. WE CAN ALSO INFER THAT INDIA WILL ACQUIRE A TOTAL OF FIVE DPSA SQUADRONS.

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4. (S/NF) WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SIMPLE NET REDUCTION OF TWO STRIKE SQUADRONS IS ACTUALLY A MUCH MORE COMPLEX ISSUE. THE IAF CURRENTLY HAS 17 "STRIKE" DESIGNATED SQUADRONS: 4 SU-7, 3 MARUT, 3 MIG-21M, 3 CANBERRA, AND 4 HUNTER. ADDITIONALLY, THERE ARE 18 SQUADRONS DESIGNATED AS "FIGHTER": 9 MIG-21FL, 7 GNAT, AND 2 MIG-21 BIS. HOWEVER, THESE AIRCRAFT ARE MULTI FUNCTIONAL AND MUST BE INCLUDED AS STRIKE CAPABLE.

5. (S/NF) MOREOVER, CURRENT IAF PLANS CALL FOR CONTINUED PRODUCTION OF THE MIG-21M THROUGH 1980 WHEN A TOTAL OF 162 AIRCRAFT WILL HAVE BEEN PRODUCED. THE CURRENT MIG-21M PRODUCTION TOTAL IS 69. THUS, BY 1980, THERE WILL BE ABOUT FOUR MORE STRIKE SQUADRONS OF THIS TYPE AIRCRAFT (ASSUMING FULL SQUADRON STRENGTH OF 16 AIRCRAFT). THE IAF IS ALSO PLANNING TO ACQUIRE A TOTAL OF 290 MIG-21 BIS AIRCRAFT IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS. THIS SHOULD ADD ABOUT 12 MORE SQUADRONS OF STRIKE-CAPABLE AIRCRAFT.

6. (S/NF) THIS INCREASE IN STRIKE-CAPABLE SQUADRONS OF 16 WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE OFFSET BY THE RETIREMENT OF SOME OF THE EXISTING FLEET. AMONG THE STRIKE-CAPABLE AIRCRAFT LISTED IN PARAGRAPH 4, THE SU-7S ARE SURE TO GO IN THE NEXT TEN

YEARS. THE MARUT FLEET IS BEING MODERNIZED, PERHAPS TO ENABLE IT TO CARRY THE DEEP STRIKE BURDEN UNTIL ALL FIVE DPSA SQUADRONS ARE ACQUIRED, AFTER WHICH IT WILL BE PHASED-OUT. THE MIG-21M IS STILL IN PRODUCTION, A RELATIVELY UP-TO-DATE AIRCRAFT, AND THE MIG-21 BIS WILL NOT EVEN BEGIN PRODUCTION UNTIL 1980. WE FEEL THAT A TRUER PICTURE OF IAF STRIKE-CAPABLE SQUADRON STRENGTH OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS LOOKS LIKE THIS:

TYPE	SQUADRONS TODAY	SQUADRONS IN TEN YEARS
CANBERRA	3	0
HUNTER	4	0
DPSA	0	5
SU-7	4	0

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MARUT	3	0
MIG-21 M	3	7
MIG-21 BIS	2	12
MIG-21 FL	9	6
GNAT	7	5
TOTAL	35	35

7. THEREFORE, OUR CONCLUSION IS THAT THERE WILL BE NO NET CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF STROKE-CAPABLE SQUADRONS DURING THE NEXT DECADE RATHER THAN A REDUCTION OF TWO AS PM DESAI HAS STATED. AS SUCH THE INDIANS CAN NOT SUSTAIN A CLAIM THAT THEY ARE DISARMING. AT THE LEAST, THEY ARE HOLDING THE NUMBER OF THEIR AIRCRAFT CONSTANT WHILE SIGNIFICANTLY UP-GRADING THE QUALITY OF THEIR FLEET.

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